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INFO RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 0682
RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT PRIORITY 0033
RUEHVI/AMEMBASSY VIENNA 1136
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SOFIA 001392

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN (PERRY), NCE (NORDBERG)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/27/2016

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BU](#)

SUBJECT: MURADOVA'S RELATIVES SEEK POLITICAL ASYLUM IN
BULGARIA

REF: A. ASHGABAT 1002

[1](#)B. STATE 156497

Classified By: DCM A. KARAGIANNIS FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

This is an action request: see para. 6.

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Exiled relatives of Turkmen dissident Muradova, who died under disputed circumstances in Turkmenistan (ref A), believe Turkmen authorities are blocking their calls to Muradova,s three children and allege that Turkmen security forces are watching the family. The two relatives are outspoken critics of the Turkmen government. They have humanitarian status in Bulgaria but seek Embassy's help in getting political asylum here. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) On September 21, we were contacted by Tadzhigul Begmedova, the sister-in-law of Turkmen journalist Ogulsapar Muradova. Begmedova and her husband Annadurdy Hadzhiev have humanitarian status in Bulgaria (temporary protection that does not give them as many legal rights as political asylum). She related the same story described in reftels: Muradova was arrested along with several family members, was tried and convicted in a closed hearing, and died in custody under suspicious circumstances. Begmedova believes the Turkmen government did not want to release the body because Muradova was tortured; she says Embassy Ashgabat was instrumental in making the authorities release the body to the family. She and her husband have been unable to contact Muradova,s three children and suspect the Turkmen authorities are blocking their calls. They hear from third parties that the family is being followed by security forces.

[1](#)3. (C) Separately, Begmedova also alerted us that Muradova,s three children may try to leave for Turkey but will most likely be stopped at the border. She believes that continued scrutiny from Embassy Ashgabat would stop the Turkmen authorities from taking drastic measures for fear of an international scandal.

[1](#)4. (C) Hadzhiev and Begmedova seek our help in gaining political asylum in Bulgaria. According to Begmedova, their continuous criticism of the Turkmen government makes them targets for persecution -- the family receives threatening phone calls from Turkmen-speaking callers, and their car was inexplicably torched in January. While Bulgarian police have no leads, Begmedova is convinced this is the work of Turkmenistan,s security forces. The family left for Bulgaria in 2002 when Hadzhiev came under close government scrutiny for his political opinions.

[1](#)5. (C) In 2003, the Varna District Court denied

Turkmenistan,s request for their extradition on embezzlement charges, finding the government's case groundless and citing fears that the charges were politically motivated. At the same time, the State Agency for Refugees granted the family humanitarian status, stopping short of political asylum. The family reapplied for asylum on September 11, citing Muradova,s death and the car torching as proof of persecution, but their application was denied. Though they are appealing the decision with the courts, they also hope Embassy assistance will persuade the Bulgarian government to reverse its decision.

16. (C) Action request: This internationally sensitive and high-profile case has not yet received much public attention in Bulgaria. That will change if the U.S. intervenes. With the case currently before the Bulgarian courts, we obviously cannot intercede formally. We do believe the Bulgarian government would value our assessment of the situation in Turkmenistan and our views on the political asylum request. With humanitarian status, Begmedova and Hadzhiev can remain in country but have fewer legal rights than political refugees. We request unclassified points we can share with the Bulgarian government.
BEYRLE